



A NEW VISION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD IN MISSOURI

The Problem:

Missouri's early childhood system is one of the least coordinated in the nation, ranking 45th in governance by the Bipartisan Policy Center in a recent report. Currently, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the Department of Social Services (DSS), and the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) all provide various early childhood services. Fragmented early care and education programs delivered by multiple state agencies results in confusion, duplication of effort, needless administrative barriers for providers, and inconsistent quality and access to services for children and families.

This lack of coordination ultimately results in diminished outcomes for Missouri's youngest children, which has impacts for all Missourians.

The Solution:

Governor Mike Parson recognized early in his first term in office that strengthening Missouri's early childhood system is critical to workforce development and the long-term success of Missouri's children and families. After spending time in child care centers across the state, gathering feedback from providers, educators and families, and meeting with child advocates and administrators within state government, the Governor believes that the current fragmentation in Missouri's early childhood system must be addressed.

The Governor proposes moving several early childhood programs across state government into one office. Accordingly, DESE will house programs related to early learning, home visiting, and child care in a new Office of Childhood.

A single governance system will benefit all stakeholders in Missouri's early childhood system. With one office, the state will gain an improved structure to support, coordinate, and monitor the programs and activities, including an enhanced ability to share goals and best practices across programs. This alignment will promote effectiveness, excellence, and equity for Missouri children.

Coordinating child care, home visitation, early intervention, and early learning requires a well-functioning mixed delivery system for early childhood, which can be accomplished through this new, consolidated office.

Funding for private child care providers and public schools will remain unchanged relative to this reorganization.

For specific questions, families and professionals should reach out to the current point-of-contact in their program. General questions about the office transition may be sent to EarlyLearning@dese.mo.gov.



ONE VISION:

Ensuring Missouri's children are safe, healthy, and successful learners



ONE TEAM, ONE OFFICE:

Office of Childhood
based in the
Department of
Elementary and
Secondary Education



A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO EARLY CHILDHOOD:

Child care, home
visiting, early
intervention, and
early learning with
strong ties to health
and family supports



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The Why:

Early childhood education delivers one of the greatest returns on investments of taxpayer dollars. According to Nobel laureate Professor of Economics James Heckman, every dollar invested in high-quality birth-to-five early childhood education for disadvantaged children delivers a 13% annual return on investment, significantly higher than the 7-10% return provided by preschool alone.

Research shows that nearly 90% of brain development occurs by the age of five and that while babies are born with the same brain cells as adults, it's the connections that brains make in the early years that lead to success later in life.

Early childhood investments are critical to children's well-being and long term success in life. Children need safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments in the earliest years of life. Considerable research shows that children who lack these basic needs come to school with cognitive and social-emotional deficits that our educational system cannot remediate.

Early care options are essential to building a strong and diverse workforce both now and in the future. Safe, quality child care allows parents to find employment, advance careers, and earn higher incomes today, while also investing in the development of a robust and reliable workforce for the next generation.

Missouri employers will also benefit from early investment in our state's future workforce.

WHY SUPPORT A CONSOLIDATED STATEWIDE OFFICE FOCUSED ON CHILDREN?

Under the leadership of DESE, the Office of Childhood can provide all children in Missouri access to an equitable, improved early childhood care and education system where all children are safe, healthy, and successful learners.

Alignment of programs will reduce duplication, improve coordination of services, and result in a more effective early childhood system. The action will also result in a stronger workforce for Missouri both now and in the future.



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